



Speech by

John-Paul Langbroek

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

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MOTION

Sale of Public Assets

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (5.29 pm): I move—

That this House:

Calls on the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition to agree to a public debate, to held in a public forum, on the planned privatisation of public assets; that such a debate be independently organised and moderated and held before any asset has been sold.

The Labor government of Queensland has a serious problem. It has set in train a policy for the privatisation of state assets—a policy which it gave no notice of prior to the last election; a policy that has angered Queenslanders from one end of the state to the other. Queenslanders are incensed that they have been so fundamentally misled by this government and by the Premier in particular. 'Queenslanders, you can count on me,' the Premier said when she stood in front of the crowd at the convention centre in March last year. The Premier said those words at the completion of a state-wide election campaign in which she purported to be outlining her plans for the term of the 53rd Parliament, but it was not true.

That night Queenslanders knew nothing of the plans the Premier had in store. Queenslanders did not know then that within 12 weeks \$15 billion worth of state owned assets in Queensland would be up for sale. They did not know that the Premier who said 'count on me' and who said that she stood for jobs, not cuts, was planning such a massive cut from the state's portfolio of government owned corporations. They did not know so many state government workers were going to have their jobs and their futures thrown into jeopardy by the Labor government. They did not know they would face massive increases in taxes and charges—charges linked directly to this shocking new policy. They just did not expect a policy so alien to everything presented by the government over the few short weeks of the election campaign.

So that brings us to the motion before the House this afternoon. On this side of the House, the Liberal National Party is proud of the way we approached that election campaign. We are proud of the honesty we displayed. We are proud that we laid out in full every detail of our agenda. We presented policies that went directly to the heart of problems in Queensland. We fully costed our policies and we explained in detail how they would be funded. Our party is still comparatively new, but in that campaign we got off on the right foot. Queenslanders knew exactly where we stood. They knew exactly how we would address the problems of the state of Queensland and they knew the priorities of the LNP.

What angers Queenslanders today is that they did not get the same respect from the ALP. They were not told of Labor's policies. They were not told how they would be funded. What they got was a sham—sham promises without even so much as sham costings to accompany them. Everyone remembers the one page with about five or six line items. That was all they got. They did not get respect from Labor in the campaign.

What is even worse is that today, a year down the track, they get no respect from Premier Bligh. They still get no respect from the Labor Party. A year after the Bligh government prospered at the polls and was rewarded because of its sham campaign of false promises, the Bligh government still arrogantly

assumes that it can treat Queenslanders without respect. It takes for granted that its rude and dismissive attitude will bring no penalty.

Today it was revealed this Premier and her ministers think so little of Queenslanders that genuine concerns from Queensland residents can be just brushed aside without so much as a signature at the bottom of a government letter. Angry Queenslanders are angry voters, but after all but 21 years in power this government is so comfortably numb, so sleepy beneath its parliamentary security blanket, that it cannot get itself out of bed just to answer a letter. So we honourable members who properly represent our constituents rise up to confront the government. We rise up to confront the Premier. Again and again, we rise up to call for accountability. Again and again, we do the bidding of Queenslanders who are cut to the quick with the dismissive indolence of the Queensland Premier.

Does the Premier think Queenslanders are happy when their heartfelt correspondence is answered by a political flunkey? Does the Premier think her contrived deafness at the last parliamentary sittings was an adequate response to the sound of hundreds of angry voices at the gates of parliament? Does the Premier think it is right that unions long affiliated with the ALP are reduced to buying roadside billboards in a vain attempt to communicate with their own government? Does the Premier think the empty charade of union delegates being sent home from the 2009 Labor state conference amounts to a genuine endorsement of these hated policies? Does the Premier think the money she will spend on her so-called people's question times will buy credibility when the one big question is always forbidden? No—respectively no, no, no, no and no.

The Premier is not Raúl Castro. This is Queensland, not Cuba. We sit in the Legislative Assembly, not the National Assembly of People's Power. Ours is a democracy, not a communist dictatorship, so the Premier needs to do things differently. She cannot run Queensland with a script from El Capitolio. Mr Speaker, typical Queenslanders like you and I are angry at the Premier, her sham policies and the way she promotes them, but like every other typical Queenslanders my opposition to the Premier does not mean that I will not hear her out. Heaven knows in this chamber I have heard again and again the hollow sound of the Premier's protestations. On this side we have heard the Premier when she claimed she told Queenslanders about her plans. We have heard her in the same parliamentary week say exactly the opposite. In this chamber, Queensland MPs have been patient.

I venture to say that outside this chamber Queenslanders from all walks of life have the same stamina. They have the same stomach. The Premier need not fear that in the state of Queensland we cannot tolerate a debate. Just because in February 2009 when Queenslanders were entitled to hear these arguments from Premier Bligh they were told nothing does not mean that they would be unprepared to hear them now.

Through this debate today I offer the Premier the opportunity to recover some small piece of her credibility squandered by the Labor Party just over a year ago. I offer the Premier a road back to respect.

Mr Fraser: Rise up!

Mr LANGBROEK: Why don't you go back to your seat? In a democracy like ours, people do respect the right of others to hold a view and to speak their mind, but they do not give respect when denied respect themselves. Again and again over the past year the closely held views of Queenslanders have been shunned by the Premier. So at this late hour I present the Premier with this last opportunity. In the democratic tradition that forms the basis of this parliament, come down from the Executive Building. Queenslanders believe true leadership can emerge only through an open and honest exchange of ideas and a genuine advocacy that represents the unvarnished truth. Leadership is about substance; it is not about political spin.

In the motion today I proposed a public debate about the question of the privatisation of state owned assets in Queensland. It is an important issue. There will be immense public interest. If it proceeds, the arguments will be put, heard and digested in a civilised manner. I have proposed a debate in a public forum independently organised with an independent moderator. In the last parliamentary sittings the Premier joined in on my comparison between this current impasse and the circumstances that surrounded the introduction of uniform national gun laws in 1998. I ask the Premier to consider this point: throughout that debate Prime Minister John Howard was never reticent to address concerned groups. We all remember the big rally he attended at which a large number of people who opposed his views were present. There are many other examples I could cite that involve Mr Howard and others who have had the good fortune as politicians to ply their trade here in Australia.

In this country and in this state we live by a code. Our political system is based on giving a fair go to all political views. I say to the Premier that she needs to trust Queenslanders before they will trust her. She should come down from her ivory tower and put her views before an open forum. I promise the Premier that I will be waiting. She can present her case, and in return on behalf of the vast majority of Queenslanders I will present mine. Be in no doubt that in my view the arguments against her fire sale of Queensland assets are overwhelming. We need to look at what will deliver the best economic prospects for the future of Queensland. We need to look at a series of privatisations that have not included

consultation with the community, that the community was never advised of, that do not include any customer service obligations and that, once again, when we are talking about the most decentralised state in the Federation, have given no consideration to what will happen if those elements are privatised without any of the consultation that we have spoken about before.

That is what the LNP stands for—a commitment to making sure that we look at what will deliver the best economic prospects for the future of Queensland, not selling assets in a fire sale, and not doing what the Premier did to the people of Queensland before the last election, which was to not give them all of the information. I say this to the Premier: if she comes to this debate she will be treated with respect. It is inconceivable that she will receive anything but a respectful and considered hearing by all who participate. Of course Queenslanders will be a hard crowd to convince but if she does not come—if she continues on this current course—she should be under no illusion that the respect of Queenslanders may be gone for good.